

Fault Lines Among Asian Americans: Pan-ethnic Identity, Policy Opinions, and Potential for Political Mobilization¹

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Abstract

Sociologists have long argued that a racial and ethnic category can be made under specific historical circumstances and, by extension, remade and unmade under a different social context. In fact, the category of “Asian American” has been devised under the precise necessity of mobilizing different immigrant-origin groups in the 1960s, building on their shared opinions about the Vietnam war and domestic racism. Today’s Asian Americans maintain diverse opinions on a very different set of issues and it is unclear whether they will continue to hold together as a group under the category of Asian American. Using survey questions on policy opinions featured in the 2016 pre-election National Asian American Survey (NAAS), this paper attempts to analyze where their policy opinions converge and diverge, and how different configurations of policy opinions lend themselves toward different forms of political mobilization. Employing latent class models, I show that while many Asian Americans share a supportive opinion about “big government,” some diverge sharply on the issue of Muslim immigration. I discuss the implications of these “fault lines” for the making, remaking, and unmaking of the Asian American category in the future.

Keywords: Asian American, NAAS, policy opinions, latent class models

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